

The background of the cover is a deep blue night sky filled with numerous white stars. A large, dark grey griffin with a lion's body and eagle's head is shown in flight, its wings spread wide. A small figure of a person is visible riding on its back. At the bottom of the cover, there is a silhouette of a castle with several spires, set against a bright, glowing orange and yellow light that resembles a sunset or sunrise.

FAIRY TALES OF KINDNESS & COURAGE

• VOLUME II •

BY NATHANAEL WRIGHT

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**FAIRY TALES
OF
KINDNESS & COURAGE**

VOLUME II



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Author's Note



I am convinced that the strength of fairy tales resides in the uplifting lessons they teach. They can be a beacon of hope in a world that tells us we can't trust in anything. They can remind us that in the grand scheme of things, good deeds are rewarded. And they can restore our faith in humanity, heaven, and the unselfish virtues that elevate humankind. In these ways fairy tales can sometimes be more real to us than what the world says are the cold hard facts of life. For the world isn't as dark and hopeless as it sometimes seems. Hope, kindness, forgiveness, and truth live on. After every night there cometh a dawn!



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The Honest Boy's Rooster



In a kingdom far away, there was once a talking rooster. His owner knew he was special because it told him so, saying, "I'm a magic rooster and if you're honest, I'll always be here to help you in your time of need. But if you lie, I'll grow sick and die." The man was very honest, and his rooster brought him much help and wealth, but one day he told a lie and his rooster fell ill. Afraid that his rooster would die, he went to an old wiseman to ask what it was that he might do to save his rooster. The wiseman informed him, "To make the rooster well, you must confess that you have lied to the person to whom you have been dishonest. Next, you must go to the rooster and whisper to him that you have confessed and are again honest."

The man remarked that he couldn't confess; he could never let the person he had lied to ever know. The old man had no other remedy: only honesty could cure the rooster. And so, because of his stubbornness, his rooster died. He regretfully buried it under a stone with a weathervane in the town's graveyard with this inscription:

"To the honest soul come of age,
with lips and tongue that speak the truth,
Awake the rooster buried here
with the words to restore its youth.

At twilight's end with dawn bespeak,
these words in order times by three,
Rooster of fortune rise again,
an honest lad doth call for thee."

Generations passed and no lad come of age with honesty on his lips ever spoke the words in front of the gravestone. That is not to say that young children untested in their honesty did not occasionally approach the grave and speak the words. Many did, yet the magic of untested lips was not enough to raise the rooster. And so, the weathervane atop the stone began to squeak, then it began to rust and still the rooster's magic lay dormant. Then one day an honest young man came to the graveyard. He had just turned 17 and the day of his coming of age where he was to leave his parents' home had nearly arrived.

In spite of his impoverished upbringing, he had learned to read, write, and do arithmetic. Worried about his future, he had wandered into the graveyard for solitude. What am I to do? he thought to himself, "I am to leave tomorrow, and I know not where to go or what to do to make my way in the world." It was then that the weathervane sticking out of the top of the stone caught his eye. As he approached it, he thought it strange that although he had not been to the graveyard since he was a small boy that he did not recall having seen it before.

As he got close, it was apparent that this was no ordinary grave. Looking at the stone, he read the words inscribed and thought them strange: "At twilight's end with dawn bespeak, these words in order times by three, Rooster of fortune rise again, an honest lad doth call for thee."

Reading the instructions, he resolved to have one last adventure of childhood. He would wait until the last shadow of morning twilight was about to greet the sun, then speak the words just as the day of his departure dawned, and return home for the last time to wish his family well. Then he would be off to the great unknown. And so, he waited all that night in the graveyard under the stars thinking on his future knowing not what it would be, but only that it would be honest. It did not occur to him that speaking the words would actually do something.

A few minutes before sunrise, he stood up facing the rising sun and the grave. Then just before sunrise he spoke the words three times, "Rooster of fortune, rise again, an honest lad doth call for thee." Almost immediately he heard a noise at his feet that was like the crackle of a fire on the wind. He looked down to see bones, feathers, and flesh being woven together in a

glowing ball of light. Transfixed, he continued to watch unmoved from the spot. After a moment when the light faded, he saw the rooster. Its head was as red as a freshly picked strawberry and its feathery body was covered with brown, green, and dark feathers. The rooster, overjoyed to again be alive, crowed three times then cocked his head to the side to get a good look at the young man who had restored him to life. "Wow, what a rooster!" The young man remarked. The rooster was silent for a moment, then spoke, "I thank you for restoring me to life. I have many magical abilities and I'll bring you wealth and good fortune. But you must always be honest. Otherwise, I'll grow sick and again die." The young man accepted, "I don't know how I'll make my way in the world. I only know that it'll be honest. I'm to leave today, and it'll be useful to have you with me on my journey. Come! I must say goodbye to my family."

And with that, the young man picked up the rooster and carried him to his parents' home. There he quickly packed a few things in a knapsack and showed them the rooster, saying only "that there was a lot to tell but that he had spent the night in the graveyard and in the morning by some magic he found it at his feet." Most of his family thought the story strange, all but his mother, who had heard strange stories as a child about magic roosters who brought good fortune. When he was done packing, she and the others wished him well saying, "perhaps he'll bring you good fortune and if not, a good meal instead."

The rooster was not amused and gave off a nervous crow. He had only just come back to life not an hour before and someone was already suggesting he be eaten. The young man picked his rooster up, bid his family goodbye, and walked out the door and down the lane. Where he was going, he did not know, but at least he now had a friend to keep him company.

After an hour or two, the young man found that he was quite exhausted. Seeing a group of bushes not far from the lane he decided to lay down and have a nap. Setting his rooster next to him, he quickly fell asleep. The rooster was not tired for he had only just come back to life, so he waited next to him for a chance to help his new master. After several hours, along came a wealthy trader with a cart full of expensive rugs and silk.

Hitting a bump in the road, a chest of fine silk fell from the back of the wagon into the road unnoticed by the merchant. The rooster saw what had happened and wasted no time in crowing to wake his master. The merchant thought nothing of the noise, but the young man awoke immediately. The rooster urged, "Quickly, there's a chest full of silk that has fallen from the back of a cart." The young man though still tired quickly got up and ran to the chest. Calling out he said, "A chest has fallen from your cart! Stop and let me bring it to you!"

The cart stopped and a man stepped down to see what was the matter. Before him was the young man carrying the chest to return it to him. "Thank you! The merchant acknowledged. "If you hadn't called out, I would have lost the silks in this chest. I'm headed to town and without them I would lose a considerable sum of money and be sure to disappoint many of my customers. It was then that he offered the young man a ride into town. The young man accepted, and the merchant was glad to bring along the young man's rooster as well. Before dark, they arrived in the town and laid down for the night.

In the morning, the merchant requested assistance in setting up shop by placing the carpets and silks out to be displayed. The young man helped him and as soon as the merchant sold his first carpet, he paid him. The young man stayed all day and to each customer the merchant told how he had been helped by the honest young man. At the end of the day, the merchant packed up his carpets and silks and bid the young man goodbye for he was to leave for the next town and then the neighboring kingdom. The young man bid him well and went in search of a place to stay the night. He had not gone far when he saw a sign for a room to rent. Counting his money, he found the merchant had paid him handsomely, so he had enough for rent perhaps even for a month.

Carrying his rooster under his left arm, he knocked on the door. An old woman entered and immediately remarked that she had seen him at the market earlier that day and had heard of his honesty from the merchant. The young man remarked that the man was kind and insisted that helping him was just the right thing to do. The woman was impressed and when the

young man inquired about the available room, she immediately invited him in to see it. It was a simple room with a bed, a window, and a small table. It was all the young man felt he needed. "I'll take it," he exclaimed. The woman responded, "That'll be one weeks rent and a little extra on account of you keeping a rooster in the house."

The young man handed her the requested amount upon which she invited him to join her and two other guests for dinner. He agreed and joined the happy company in the dining room. The woman's guests were a knight of the king and his squire. After introductions they all sat down to a hearty dinner of beef stew. The knight and the woman were quite talkative. And the young man and squire sat and listened while they ate. The young man was careful to not be seen putting a few pieces of beef and vegetable into a napkin for his rooster. As he finished his dinner, he saw that the talkative two were likely to go on for hours, so he thanked the woman for the meal and excused himself for the night. On his way to his room, she called out that breakfast would be in the pantry, but that she would not be there to serve it. Opening the door of his room, the young man pulled the napkin out of his pocket and fed his patient rooster. Then the young man put himself and his rooster to bed for the night.



In the morning, the young man awoke to the quiet house. Turning to his side, he saw that his rooster was already awake. He thought it strange that

the rooster had not crowed at the rising of the sun. When he inquired the rooster responded, "It would be rude for me to awaken the woman and her guests. I've learned over many lifetimes the manners of people. Besides, if I was to crow, the woman might have me thrown out and I would not want you to lose your bed or have us separated."

It was then that the young man recalled that breakfast awaited then in the pantry. He rose quickly and knowing the woman would not be about he brought his rooster with him. Throwing open the pantry doors, he saw bread and flour cakes. The rooster too was excited and so he jumped in the air flapping upward to a shelf in the pantry. Unfortunately, this startled the young man who knocked over a painted plate that sat near the pantry doors. The plate fell to the floor and shattered into what might as well have been a thousand pieces. "Oh, look what we've broken, rooster!" He groaned. "It looks special," the rooster whispered, "now we must clean it up and tell the woman when she returns." The two cleaned up the broken plate, quietly ate breakfast, and returned to their room.

A half hour later, the woman returned. The young man left his room and approached her in the kitchen. "Ma'am!" he began, "My rooster and I came in the kitchen this morning to eat breakfast and in our excitement, we broke a painted plate. I want to pay you for it." The woman remarked that she was glad for his honesty. She had only bought the plate the day before and it was not very expensive, and easy to replace.

The young man paid her for the plate and then he and the rooster left for the center of town. Now as you might have guessed from her talkative nature the night before, the old woman had a tongue that said more in a day than some people say in a week. A few minutes after the young man left, she immediately began to go from house to house and person to person telling them about the honest young man. In addition, unbeknownst to the young man, the knight and his squire had been in the house quietly listening from their room to the breaking of the plate and the young man's honest confession. The knight had been tasked by his lordship the king to seek out honest men and women young and old and bring them to the castle. When he heard the honesty of the young man and that he paid for the broken plate,

the knight knew that this might well be the best he could find. For honesty in little things often reflects honesty in great things. But first he had to test him.

The young man and his rooster wandered through the town past shops and houses until they found a bakery. They entered and were greeted by the strong scent of freshly baked bread. The young man apologized for bringing in his rooster and purchased a penny loaf from the baker's daughter. Returning outside, he found shade under a walnut tree and laid down to share his penny loaf with his rooster. The rooster pecked away at his piece of bread as the young man remarked, "It's nice to have money to rent a room and buy bread for a time. But how will I make my way in the world?"

The rooster stopped pecking at his bread and reassured him, "We'll find something, don't you worry, master. We'll find something." A few minutes went by and an old man who barely seemed to be able to walk approached them leading a horse. The horse was brown with white feet and a mane that had recently been cut. He looked to be the finest one the young man had ever seen. "Excuse me, young man, are you capable of helping an old man with a request?"

The young man answered, "yes, if I can help. What do you need?" The old man revealed, "I must deliver this steed and a small bag of gold to a man in a nearby town as payment for a piece of property, but my legs are not as strong as they once were, and I fear I won't arrive before sunset." Before the old man could continue, the rooster crowed and looked at young man as if to say, "go help."

Without another word spoken, the young man stood up and accepted, "I'll help you. Where must I take the horse and money?" He inquired. The old man directed him to a small path that led to a neighboring town and instructed that when he arrived, he must ask for the stableman named Vance. The young man departed right away, placing his rooster on the back of the horse. Seeing that the path was well traveled, he felt confident in his direction.

About three hours later when the young man and his rooster were a little over halfway to the town, a man approached them. He wore a brown cloak and most of his blonde hair was uncovered. His smile was friendly, the kind that might make someone who was more familiar with him feel comfortable and safe. "I know where you're going with that horse. Let me pay you handsomely for it. It'll be enough for you to travel away from here and buy a cottage."

The young man immediately declined, "Sir, I won't give it thought. I've been entrusted by my word to bring this horse to the stableman. I won't sell it to you, but good day."

The young man walked past him and continued his journey. A half an hour later another man approached him and made the same offer. The young man again insisted that he would not give it a thought, for he had been entrusted by his word to bring the horse to the stableman. Again, he moved on. With two men having asked for the horse, the young man and his rooster began to be very suspicious and a little worried.

At last, when they were nearly to the town, a third person approached them. A woman with a beautiful face and a brown cloak that barely concealed more costly garments underneath tempted him, "I know where you're going with that horse. You're new here and you can leave at any time to make your way in the world where you like. Give me the bag of gold and I can make it worth your while."

Her eyes were pretty, and her smile was charming indeed, yet the young man was not dissuaded. "I've been entrusted by my word with these things and I'll only deliver them to the stableman, but good day," he firmly stated. Yet, the woman would not leave. She again asked pining for the bag of gold. The young man maintained that he would only deliver these things to the stableman Vance. When she insisted a third time, she grabbed his sleeve. It was then the rooster had enough. With a crow and a flap of its wings, it leaped towards the woman. She was startled and with one peck of the rooster's beak, she fled. The young man thanked his rooster who proudly puffed out his chest as he was again placed atop the horse.

The two moved on and soon arrived at the town and inquiring where they could find the stables and the stableman Vance. They were directed only a short way and arrived quickly. There the young man was surprised to see the talkative knight he had seen at dinner the evening before. Upon seeing the young man with the horse, the knight greeted him, "I'm Vance or Sir Vance. I'm glad to see that you have arrived with the horse. Let me apologize for those who tried to dissuade you from your honesty. It was I who hired them. It was then that the knight pulled out from his person a scroll and presented it to the young man. I've been commissioned by the king to find such persons that are honest and trustworthy and to bring them to him. I've searched and no one has been as perfect and upright as you have been. We'll rest here for the night and in the morning, we'll journey to the castle where I'll present you to the king."

In turn, the young man did not know what to say. He could see the seal of the king upon the commission though the thought of meeting him seemed as if out of a dream. The young man agreed to go with the Sir Vance and in part due to the excitement, their journeys had made them tired enough that they slept very well. None snored as well as the rooster though. He was quite pleased with himself.

When dawn came the young man, rooster, Sir Vance the knight, and his squire all departed for the castle. Again, that night they slept and the following morning they arrived at the castle in all its splendor. It stood tall with each perfect stone having been laid with the utmost care. Banners flew from every tower and trumpets hailed their arrival. Every guard and servant hailed Sir Vance and to each he gave a nod of acknowledgement. The young man was awestruck. Never before had he been so close to the king's castle let alone been permitted to enter it. Once inside the gates, Sir Vance dismounted from his horse and signaled for the young man to follow him. The young man picked up his rooster and followed closely behind. A moment later, a servant approached Sir Vance stating, "The king will see you now." Sir Vance thanked the servant and proceeded glancing briefly behind to be sure that the young man still followed him.

They shortly entered the king's Court. The king seeing Sir Vance enter, immediately asked him who it was he had brought with him and if his quest had been successful. Sir Vance addressed the king, "Your Royal Majesty, I thank you for hearing me with such swiftness. Your highness recalls four moons ago that I was sent to find the most honest persons in the Kingdom. Having searched and tested many men and women, something has always come up lacking. Two days ago, when I was about to lose hope, I found the young man you see before you."

Sir Vance continued telling the king about the young man's honesty in little things like the chest of silk and broken plate. He then proceeded to explain how he had tested the young man in having him deliver a horse and a bag of gold, how the young man had been tempted three times but had stayed firm in his honesty. The king was impressed and called the young man forward. "Young man, is everything Sir Vance has spoken true?"

"Yes, your majesty," he answered. "Tell me what brought you into the company of my most trusted Knight?" The king requested. "Your highness, I only left home three days ago to find my way in the world. And I found myself in the same town as Sir Vance," he replied.

"Tell me what's the importance of this rooster you carry?" The king asked.

It has been my companion since I left home and by the closeness that I keep with it, you might say it represents my honesty. Though I don't know how I'll make my way in the world, I've made up my mind that it'll always be honest," he affirmed.

"Impressive," the king responded, "Tell me, young man, have you the ability to count and keep a tally with a pen?" The young man assured the king that he could.

"Can you write?" The king added. The young man confirmed that he could. "Excellent!" The king enthusiastically responded. "Guardsmen, take this young man to the Treasury. I have need for someone to keep an

accounting of my wealth. If you can count the room of gold by morning, you'll be my new Treasurer and I'll pay you a hundred coins a week."

The young man was excited, "Thank you, your majesty!" The guardsman wasted little time in escorting the young man to the Treasury. As he stepped out, he turned to see Sir Vance smiling. He grinned back; it was all the knight needed to see to know he was grateful.

Down, down, down the polished stone steps of the castle they went. Deep into its heart past the dungeon they walked until at last they came to a room with a small gate. A man with dark circles under his eyes, wearing a fine brown coat sat at a table in front of the gate, and inside the gated room the young man and his rooster could see a locked door that went to still another room. "Welcome, you must be the new Treasurer. My name is Scath. Here's your key!" the man raspily noted, handing it to the young man. You must count the room full of gold by morning. If you complete the task, the king will reward you. The guard will open the gate for you before he returns to the Court," he added.

The young man was excited. "Now is my chance! I've found how to make my way in the world!" He thought to himself. Scath disappeared and a moment later, the gate opened. Next, the young man stepped inside, holding only his rooster and the key to the door. The gate closed behind him, and he gently placed down his rooster.

Approaching the locked door, he tried his key. It turned, but the lock stayed fast, and the door stayed closed. The young man turned it again, and again. But the door simply would not budge. "I must have been given the wrong key!" He said out loud. It was then that he heard Scath's raspy voice, "Yes, I gave you the wrong key. You won't take my position as the Treasurer. In the morning you'll be escorted to the Court before the king and will have nothing. Then you'll be cast out. Goodnight!" He chuckled.



A second later, he disappeared again. The young man was heartbroken. He had been so close to the opportunity of a lifetime and now he was to be shamed by his failure in the Court and then cast out all because he didn't have the right key. He couldn't let Scath win. There had to be a way in, but the more he looked, the more he realized there was nothing he could do.

A few minutes went by, and the young man sat on the floor. For a moment he had forgotten his rooster was still with him. He looked at him grateful, "If I'm to be cast out at least, I still have you." His rooster looked up at him bright eyed, then cocked his head to the side as if preparing himself for something. He then let out a crow that echoed through the base of the castle. All fell silent and then a distinct click came from the door and its lock. Slowly its hinges swung open. The young man exclaimed, "You did it!"

Immediately, he restrained himself for fear that Scath would hear. The two waited breathless, but only the sound of the flicker of lamps and their beating hearts greeted them. They breathed easy now. The rooster wasted no

time and squeezed his way through the gate to fetch the paper, pen, and ink that laid on the table outside. He brought them to the gate one by one and then squeezed back through. By lamplight the two entered the room to see a massive pile of gold and treasure. Not to be discouraged the two set to work right away counting and tallying the coins and treasures. Just before dawn the two had completed their task.

They fell asleep for about an hour until the guard who had brought them the day before returned with food. He awoke them and instructed that they eat quickly before they were brought before the king. The two swiftly ate as instructed and were escorted to the Court. When they arrived, they saw Scath among those present waiting with a wicked smile upon his face. The king ordered the young man to give his accounting upon which the young man began to read the tallies of gold and treasures.

With each item, Scath began to grow paler and paler. When the young man finished, the king requested that the previous counting from the month prior be brought. There in the court the two were compared finding that there was a discrepancy between the old and the new. Ten thousand coins were missing. Scath objected, saying that the young man did not count all the coins and treasures. He alleged that he must have “planned to report less than there was so he could slowly take it for himself.” The Court did not know what to think. Scath had given a trusted account for so long that surely the discrepancy couldn't be his doing. Why had this young man been brought by Sir Vance to disgrace him? All eyes were on the king.

The king knew who was honest, but the rooster spoke to the court before the king even opened his mouth. It told how the young man had been brought to the gate, how he was given the wrong key by Scath, and then how Scath had mocked them as he left them unable to do their job. Lastly, he finished by mentioning the magic of his crow that unlocked the door for he was a magic rooster only kept alive by the young man's honesty. The entire Court, including the king, was speechless. A talking rooster was a miraculous tale not to be believed, except that they had all heard it. The king smiled and before Scath could flee, the king called for his guards to

cast him in the deepest darkest cell of the dungeon. Scath resisted, but it was useless. He was locked away.

As for the young man, the king kept his word, so the young man was paid quite well. He grew in favor with the king and all the advisors and servants of the court. His family soon received word of his success and that the King truly trusted no one else with the keeping of his wealth. Regarding the rooster, he lived comfortably with the young man in the castle. He was respected and well fed. The two had many more wonderful adventures. But that is a tale for another time.

The End



The Cup of Kindness



In a land far across the sea where the waters turn from a deep blue to a shining silver, lies the Kingdom of Telmore. There in the king's castle was once a cup. It was not a particularly valuable, cup except that it was from the king's own table. There were nearly twelve like it; specifically, each had lovely images of flowers and deer cast into their sides with a ring of silver around their tops. One night one of the beloved cups was stolen by a thief, who in his swift flight from the castle, was unable to get away with anything else of value. The king Andrew had personally invited the man in as an act of kindness. Though it was just a cup, the king was very bothered.

As a result, he and his servants took great lengths to recover it. When neither it nor the thief were found, the king ensured that the missing cup would always be remembered. And so, as a tradition, the king's table always lacked one of its cups. He hoped that since it had been taken when his kindness was given, it would be returned one day by a hand of kindness.

Years passed and the king grew old and died. His son Andrew the Second ascended to the throne and married a beautiful queen Juliana. Together they had a brighteyed daughter with hair the color of golden sunlight and green eyes like the most perfect clovers. She was born with a birthmark on her right shoulder and the midwife remarked that it looked like a tiny angel wing. They named her Amia and found joy in her lovely smile and sweet laugh.

But their happiness was cut short. Soon the threat of war came upon them. Within weeks of the princess' birth threats and aggression from a neighboring country were reported in the king's court. An enemy army was

being formed and would soon attack Telmore's borders with means to storm the castle.

But among this, the most worrisome threat was directed at the newly born princess. It was said that men had been hired to kidnap her. Upon hearing it, the king immediately put all his guards on high alert and had the night watch doubled. Yet in the coming days as the king's army mustered for war, the king and queen decided that their princess could only be truly safe if she was hidden away in secret. And so, the king chose one of his most trusted servants Bertrude, a kind woman who had also worked for his father, to take his beloved daughter to the distant edge of the kingdom and raise her in secret until the war had ended. Although only six months old, Princess Amia was quietly sent off to be raised in a farmhouse away from her family and the war that threatened them all.

Bertrude raised the princess with gentleness and taught her to be kind to all creatures whether they did the same to her or not. Even though the war dragged on for several years, the princess was kept safe all the while. To protect her in case foreign invaders came, the woman never told the little princess who she was, only that she was very glad to have adopted her and that she loved her very much. One day when Amia was three years old, she discovered that Bertrude had fallen asleep with her washboard while washing clothes near the river.



The old woman was pale, and her skin was cold to the touch. It was the kind of sleep that one couldn't wake from. The princess stayed with her, but day by day the food in and around the little farm cottage ran out. As the little princess became hungry, she began to wander the country roads, searching for someone to help her. She was certain now that her adopted mother was gone and she didn't know where to go or what to do. For a time, the little princess went from place to place searching and begging for food. One day she was found by a red headed man in a cart who brought her to an orphanage.

There were many little girls who lived in the orphanage. Some were mean and others were nice. The administrator of the orphanage who everyone referred to as Madame was a middle-aged woman who always seemed very cross. She was a little short with dark hair the color of night and very strong; so strong in fact that many of the girls received dark bruises when she would beat them. She often gave the girls arbitrary tasks to perform and always required that they do more than their share of the

cleaning. Amia did her best to be kind to the other girls in the orphanage and avoided drawing attention to herself when Madame was around. She was grateful for the food and warm bed and learned to sweep and keep house, but it seemed that not a day would pass that she didn't draw a beating from Madame. Amia was seven now and felt that she couldn't possibly live another day in the orphanage. And so, one night when everyone was asleep, she snuck out, never planning to return.

As dawn arrived, the little princess was far away from the orphanage and as she walked down the road, she saw a little farmhouse a far off. "I will knock the door," she whispered to herself, "and when whomever lives there answers, I will say that I can sweep and keep house if only they will give me a meal and a bed of hay to sleep in." Approaching the house she could hear the cluck, cluck, of hens and the crow of a rooster. Upon entering the gate to the yard and down the walkway to the door, she could smell the scent of herbs and mint growing along the path. When she arrived to the door, she wasted no time and knocked on it. The woman of the house answered. "Hello, my dear!" she greeted. "Hello," Amia answered, "I need a place to sleep; and if you can offer a bed of hay and a meal. I can sweep and keep house." Afraid that perhaps it was not enough, she added, "And the chickens, I can feed the chickens."

The woman was taken aback since it was not every day that a little girl came asking for a bed and a meal. "Where are you from? And to whom do you belong?" the woman asked.

"I'm an orphan," Amia responded. "I ran away from the orphanage." Amia continued to explain, but the woman could see the little girl had a dark mark on her arm. And that bruise by itself spoke a thousand words to the compassionate woman. She listened intently and when Amia finished, the woman invited Amia inside the cozy farmhouse.

"Here my dear, this is your breakfast. My name is Mala," the woman offered as she handed the little princess a bowl of steaming porridge. Grateful, Amia replied, "thank you" and immediately began to eat. A few minutes later, the woman's husband entered. "Who's this?" he asked. "Her name is Amia," the farmer's wife answered. "She's an orphan, and she says

she can sweep, keep house, and feed the chickens if we give her a place to stay.”

Then turning to Amia, she introduced him, “Amia, this is my husband, Tarin.” Tarin only paused for a moment observing, “She looks tired. Let’s prepare her bed and she can begin feeding the chickens tomorrow.”

Amia finished her bowl of warm porridge and was quickly given another. It was sweet and delicious, and she thought it better than any food she had eaten at the orphanage. Her bed was quickly prepared and when she finished eating, she thanked the couple and fell fast asleep under its soft covers. Though noon of that day had not yet arrived, Amia slept till dusk and then all that night until the morning.

At dawn she was awoken by a late rooster’s crow. At first, she did not know where she was, but after a moment she remembered the kind couple who fed her and gave her a place to sleep. In a moment she rose from her bed and without saying anything, went outside to feed the chickens. Tarin the farmer was already outside and wished her a good morning. Then he directed her where to find grain for the chickens in a little wooden feed shack that they used for storage. Amia returned with it moments later and began to feed the chickens. Though they crowded around the grain she threw upon the ground, the birds were good natured and did not give her trouble. “I do hope they let me stay,” she whispered to herself.

When she was done, Amia returned the bag of feed to the little wooden shack. Having been used to work in the orphanage, she went inside, found the broom, and began to sweep. Mala was impressed, because many children Amia's age did not wish to do chores. So the three worked for an hour or two and when their chores were done, they sat down at the table for a late breakfast. The couple asked Amia about what she remembered from her childhood and what sort of games she liked to play. Amia inquired how long they had lived there, and which chicken was their favorite. When the afternoon came around, they all felt very content with each other's company.

Over the coming days and weeks, they all began to grow quite close. Taren introduced Amia to their pig named Sow and because of her kindness, the rooster began to comfortably perch upon Amia's shoulder every time she would enter the yard. Indeed, Amia began to feel at home. One morning at breakfast Taren and Mala told Amia a story that once there was a happy couple who wanted children. They had tried everything to have a family, but nothing worked. Then one day a little girl came knocking at their door. She was an orphan, and she needed a place to stay. The couple fell in love with that wonderful little girl, and they wished to adopt her. There was a pause and then Mala asked, "Amia, can we adopt you? Can I be your mother, and can Taren be your father?"

Amia smiled brightly and then cried, "yes," she nodded. What a joyous occasion that day was; indeed, it was the best kind of day. When Amia felt loved and wanted, and her two parents who had waited years for a daughter now found their fond wish granted. All felt complete in the pure joy that only love and kindness can bring.

In turn, Amia grew up in that home with her two loving parents. Everyone from the chickens, the pig, to the neighbors down the dirt road both ways saw Amia's kindness. Her gentle works and lovely face graced the mind of everyone whom she came in contact. At sixteen she fell in love with a young man down the street. He was very handsome and had been the son of a merchant who had passed away. He did not possess any particular skill, but the dwindling wealth of his father had forced him to make a living. Amia did not care, because she loved him and soon the two were married. Taren and Mala were not sure that marriage with the young man was a good idea. But Amia was so set on him, they eventually gave their blessing.

Things went well for a few months. Then one day Amia sensed that something was wrong. She was right! It was not long after that the young man came home one day and said that he no longer wanted to be with her. He had spoken with a magistrate and in the morning the legal formalities would be carried out and she had to leave. Amia cried the most painful tears she had ever felt. Nothing she had ever experienced, not even the abuse at

the orphanage cut her kind heart like this did. That night she cried until she became so exhausted that she fell asleep.

Whether the young man felt guilt for what he had done, I do not know. Yet, in the morning a magistrate's servant came to the house. It was a tradition and the law in the kingdom that when a woman was cast out of her former husband's house, she was allowed to take one piece of his property with her. Most women would take a horse for it offered the opportunity to travel to a new town and by selling it gain money to start a new life. But in spite of his cruelty to her, she knew that he needed his horse, so she chose to take something else.

In his kitchen cabinets there was a cup. It was a fancy cup with very ornate images of flowers and deer cast into its side. Although it was mostly made of brass, it had what appeared to be a ring of silver about the top. Amia took the cup, feeling that it might be of some value. The young man mocked her by saying that the cup looked special. He claimed that it was just junk that his father had received among other items in a trade for furs. Yet Amia did not listen to him. She smiled at the magistrate's servant and silently left, hiding her tears until she returned home to her parents' farm up the street.

Perhaps it was good that she had come home. Taren and Mala were beginning to get older, and they had begun to need care. Amia loved them so and was glad to be there for them like they had been for her. She helped them and many others. She did not let the pain that the young man had caused make her bitter or unkind. From time-to-time, travelers and others who were lost would pass by the little farm. Amia would offer to assist.

For example, an old nun who was on an errand stopped to lean on the fence one day in front of the little farmhouse. Amia saw her and invited her in to rest. The old woman limped, so Amia supported her carefully helping her inside. Amia prepared her a meal and insisted that she stay the night to fully rest herself. As dinner was set out for the nun, Amia filled the ornate cup and set it before her saying, "I give the best for my guest."

The old nun was grateful, and she slept very well that night. In the morning Amia fed her again and then accompanied the old nun on the six mile walk to the town. Amia offered support when the nun's legs again grew tired and sore. As they parted, the nun thanked her saying, "Surely, your good deeds and kindness will invite a great blessing from Providence." Amia returned home late that night full of the joy that good deeds bring.

Not long after a sickly man with a pale face and a walking stick passed by. Again, like the nun, he leaned upon the fence. Amia asked him what was wrong. "I have eaten something poisoned, and I feel more ill and weak than I have ever before, and I still have such a far way to go before I arrive home." Amia immediately invited him in to rest and asked him to lay upon the bed. The man had a terrible fever, so she made him comfortable and gave him cool water to drink with the beautiful cup. When the worst of his fever subsided, she fed him and then he slept for a night a day and then another night.



When he awoke, Amia and her parents were glad to see that he was well. It occurred to the man that he did not know any of their names. "My name is Kel, I thank you greatly for your hospitality, I am certain it saved my life.

What are your names?" he inquired. Amia, Taren, and Mala then introduced themselves each in turn. The man lingered to chat only briefly before hurriedly departing for his home. On his way out, he thanked them again, saying that he was sure some great blessing would come upon them for their kindness. With or without a blessing, Amia was glad to help.

She served many others, in fact. One day on her way to market to sell eggs, she found a little girl who was sad. She was lost and Amia helped her find her mother. On another day on a similar trip, she discovered an old soldier who felt lonely. She listened to his stories and then escorted him home. Although she did not sell any eggs that day, she was glad to have helped.

One evening Amia arrived home from the market just as the sun went down. As she went to enter the house, a man called out to her, asking how far it was to the castle. She turned around and saw a man finely dressed with a green coat and boots on his feet sitting atop a horse. Both appeared to be quite exhausted. She answered that it was quite far; and that if he wished, her and her parents would welcome him to stop there for the night. The man gratefully agreed and tied up his horse. He came inside immediately and slumped into a chair. Amia set to work preparing dinner for all present; and after a moment of resting, the man introduced himself as Mr. Wilhelm, a servant of the king.

Amia and her parents each introduced themselves and began to ask him questions as he told them about his business and all about the king's court. Amia left briefly to feed Mr. Wilhelm's horse and then returned. At last dinner was ready and set before the four at the table. Amia filled cups with cider (a rare treat for their household) and placed them at the table, giving Mr. Wilhelm the special cup. When Amia sat down, Mr. Wilhelm inquired, "Where did you get this cup?"

Amia responded, "It was owed to me by my former husband before I was cast out of his home. He received it from his father who I was told received it in a trade for furs."

"Young lady," he began, "this is a cup from the king's table, one from a set of twelve that has long been missing. Indeed, it was taken from the

king's father. It has been well remembered in the royal household. If you return it, there's sure to be a great reward."

The remainder of the talk that evening was about the cup. As dinner finished, Mr. Wilhelm felt groggy and retired to bed. As he laid down, he spoke to Amia who was busy cleaning from dinner, "Let me repay your kindness to me. Please come with me tomorrow and I'll introduce you to the royal court. Think of what a small reward from that cup might do to bless you and your parents," he offered. Then shortly he fell asleep.

In the morning Amia brought the cup and accompanied the man on horseback. By midafternoon, they had arrived at the castle. Mr. Wilhelm had another of the servants send word to the king that he had returned and that he wished to speak with him about an important matter. A short time later, the servant came back and said that the king would see him. Mr. Wilhelm and Amia were then escorted into the grand palace. The giant room of the king's court had a ceiling higher than anything Amia had ever before seen. And the stone floors shined like they had been polished by a river for a hundred years. The king was well groomed and had a look of strength and gentleness about his face. All around him were his advisors well dressed and curious why a peasant girl had been brought to the court.

"Sire," Mr. Wilhelm began, "You and this court recall the story told by your father of a man who stole a cup from his table. Ever since that day there has been one missing." The king and many of his advisors nodded. Mr. Wilhelm continued, "On my return from the West Counties, I found myself quite tired at the going down of the sun. It was then that I was invited to rest for the night by the fair maiden before you. She and her parents were so kind to me and my horse that they gave me a place to rest and laid a dinner before me. It was then to my surprise that I was served drink in this cup. Amia handed the cup to Mr. Wilhelm who presented it and offered it to the king. Your majesty will observe that it's a bronze cup with a ring of silver engraved the same as the eleven at the royal table. This is indeed the missing cup spoken about by your father."

The king was delighted for the return of the cup and insisted that the young lady and Mr. Wilhelm join the royal family for dinner that evening. The cup was handed to yet another servant and Amia was escorted to a room where she was to be bathed and dressed for dinner. An old woman who had served the royal family for years as a midwife was given the task of assisting her. Amia, who was not accustomed to being dressed and bathed by someone else, was patient. "What's your name, dear?" the old woman inquired. "My name is Amia," Amia answered.

All at once, the old midwife saw the birthmark on Amia's shoulder. She gasped, then excused herself, locking the door behind her. Amia was confused, but she was even more perplexed when the woman returned with the royal physician a few minutes later. He put her at ease and examined her birthmark declaring, "Yes, this is indeed the princess!" The doctor and midwife then explained to Amia how she had been secreted away at birth because of the war. Then several years later when her caretaker was found dead, the little princess was missing. Amia was stunned, since she had always thought of herself as nothing but a simple orphan girl when in truth she was a princess!

The doctor left to tell the king, and the midwife bathed and dressed Princess Amia. What had turned out to be a special visit to the castle and royal court over a missing cup had turned into more than she could have dreamed. The king sent away most of his advisors and declared that there would be a private celebration with the royal family and only a few guests. When Princess Amia was dressed, the queen entered the room and embraced her tearfully "My little princess, how I'm glad that you've been found alive." The princess joined her new family for dinner and there was rejoicing in the hall like there hadn't been for nearly eighteen years.



At dinner the king insisted that the princess tell about her life. What had happened from the time her caregiver had passed away until now? Amia explained how she had wandered, been brought to the orphanage, how she had been mistreated, and then how she ran away and was adopted by Taren and Mala. She recalled how kind they had been in raising her and then how she had married the boy down the street. Then she discussed how he cast her out with an order from a magistrate and how she chose to take the cup as her inheritance.

Finally, she explained that she returned to be with her adopted parents and how she began to care for them and for others who needed help. Then she talked about how she had invited the king's servant in for dinner and how he saw the cup then invited her to accompany him to the castle and royal court to be with them now. The king was very angry! He bellowed, "how dare these people, the administrator of the orphanage and that young man, mistreat my daughter!"

He called for the guard to send for them that they might be executed. It was then that Amia stood up and requested, "If it would please the king, I was told that I was to be rewarded for bringing the missing cup from your majesty's table. As your daughter, I ask only one thing: that you not be

angry with those who mistreated me. If they had known who I was, then they would not have treated me like they did.”

The king granted her wish, saying that it was enough that she had returned to be with them. Then after pausing a moment, he added, “It would please your grandfather to know that it was your kind hands that returned the cup to be with us.”

A few short weeks later on the Princess' Amia's eighteenth birthday, a celebration was held for her return. All citizens of the kingdom were in attendance for the announcement and festivities. When she was presented, those who had had been unkind to her were struck with fear; and within only a few hours, they had fled the kingdom for their lives. Taren and Mala were welcomed into the royal household as honored guests, along with all their chickens, and the pig.

Time went by and Princess Amia became completely accustomed to her new life. Eventually she married a wonderful prince who loved and cherished her as a husband should. All in all, there is a lesson here for each of us. Like the princess, we should always treat one another with kindness. One day we might very well find out that those with whom we interact with are indeed princes and princesses.

The End



The Bottled Ship



A little inland from the seashore of the old kingdom once lived a young man named Jack who was given a special gift. It was a fantastic ship in a bottle. Knowing of his interest in adventurous stories, his dreams of the sea, and his love of pirates, his uncle had given it to him for his birthday. If his uncle had known truly how special this particular ship in a bottle was, then perhaps he might not have given it away so readily. Yet after the celebration there it sat apart from the other gifts. Jack was more interested in the bottle than his other gifts and picked it up, looking through the glass at the pirate ship. It was something special unlike other ships in bottles it possessed more minute details of the deck, rigging, and hull. For another thing, the ship couldn't have fit into the opening of the bottle even with its sails folded down. It was much too big.

So there it stood in all its splendor inside the bottle looking as if some magic had taken it from the real world and placed it inside more than a hundred years earlier. Jack examined the cork, it looked old, but sealed the bottle well. To his family, Jack seemed transfixed and though they told him, he did not hear them say it. He continued to look at the ship late into the night and as the hour grew later he began to think he could see something moving inside. Finally, knowing how late it had gotten, he placed the bottle on a shelf in his room and retired to bed.

That night as he slept, he dreamt of the excitement of being in a ship on rough seas. Then in the early morning, he thought he heard the sound of a ship's bell ringing to signal the end of the watch. Yet when he awoke, he was sure it had all been just a dream. On his way to school, he told his younger sister Emiline. She found it exciting and after school they played

pirates in the backyard of their home. When they were done, Emiline affectionately remarked, "Jack, I love you. You're the best brother a sister could hope for."

But Jack didn't reply. "Jack what are you thinking about?" she inquired. Jack and Emiline had always been very open with each other and so he responded, "Annette." Annette was a pretty redheaded girl in his class at school. "Oh you like her!" Emiline teased. "And what if I do?" He confessed. "I could tell her?" Emiline continued. "You wouldn't," he paused then added, "besides, I'm going to do it!" he confidently spouted. "When?" Emiline pressed. Not wanting to back down, he answered, "Next Tuesday, when we first leave class." Emiline was excited she had met Annette once before and thought she was nice. "I'll hold you to it," she promised.

That night as Jack laid down in bed. he was still thinking about Annette. Lying there, he thought he heard the noise of waves and the creaking of a ship. Then he thought he heard a ship's bell signal the beginning of the first watch. He paused; he was sure he'd heard it! Though it had seemed distant, it sounded as though it came from the bottle on his shelf. The sound of waves against the hull of a ship followed. Jack got up from his bed and walked towards the shelf where the ship in a bottle sat. He was now sure that the origin of the sounds came from the bottle. He picked it up, looking at it as he had the previous day. Though there was no water in the bottle, the deck of the ship appeared a little wet. A moment later, it seemed that something moved upon it. Curious what was happening, Jack decided to have a look through the end of the bottle by pulling out the cork. The cork was firmly in the bottle, yet after a pull and a twist it seemed to loosen, then out it came. In an instant, Jack found himself on the main deck of a pirate ship in a distant port.

It was very rainy, and a little water was running over the scuppers. In spite of the storm, deck hands were busy preparing the ship to sail by checking the rigging and bringing supplies aboard. A strong looking man dressed in a white shirt and a sailors vest approached Jack addressing him as captain and began to talk about their departure. Other boys might have felt disoriented, but not Jack; instead, he took a moment to examine himself

finding that he was dressed as a captain. In his left hand he held the empty bottle and in his right hand he held the cork. Putting the two together briefly, the scene faded and he found himself in his room with the bottle full. Pulling the two apart he again found himself on the deck of the ship. Once, then twice more he put them together and then separated them. Not in the least being afraid of his new world, he left the bottle uncorked and put both into his captain's jacket.



The man before him, whom he determined to be his first mate, continued to talk about the details of their journey. Based on Jack's extensive knowledge about pirates, he asked where he might find a copy of their code or more formally the articles of agreement for their journey. The first mate directed him to the captain's quarters where he retrieved them from a small locked cabinet. Jack read through them and then returned them to the cabinet. Immediately there was a commotion on the deck. A shout from a man could be heard over the storm. Jack and his first mate left the cabin to investigate. A messenger had arrived bringing urgent news. The ship was not to sail, and the king's guard had been dispatched to arrest the captain, officers, and all on board. The first mate turned to Jack who announced, "Let us depart!" "Hoist the sails!" the first mate commanded.

In a few moments they were off and not a moment too soon for the king's guard could be seen at the dock. A few fired shots at the ship, but it was futile for Jack and his crew were already a good distance from shore. In spite of the rain which poured and poured, the wind stayed mostly favorable. They set course hopeful they would find wealthy Spanish ships they could plunder and after an hour or two it stopped raining. The main sail was hoisted and for a while Jack took the helm keeping it on a steady course south. But as the sun went down and the sky filled with stars, he began to grow tired and handed the helm to the first mate. Bedding down in his captain's quarters, he soon fell asleep with the bottle and cork still in his pocket.

In the morning Jack awoke to find himself in an unfamiliar bed. But after a few seconds, he recalled how he began his adventure as a pirate. He immediately worried that he was late for school in the real world. Pulling out the bottle, he recorked it. Back in his bedroom in his normal clothes, he looked out the window to see the morning sun just rising. "What day is it?" he wondered. Opening the door to his bedroom he walked down the hall to find his mother who had just gotten up preparing breakfast in the kitchen. "What day is it?" Jack asked. She paused, "It's Friday," she answered. "Oh, good" he acknowledged. His mother ignored the strange expression in his question and reminded him that he had only a half an hour to be ready for school.

As Jack returned to his room and prepared himself to leave, he thought "I'm sure I was gone for at least sixteen hours, but when I returned it was only morning. Jack walked to school with his little sister who could tell that he was somehow different. He seemed excited, perhaps it was the thought of talking with Annette on Tuesday? She thought. All that day Jack could think of nothing, but going home that afternoon to return to his ship. He was so lost in thought, he didn't even think to look for Annette like he usually did. Finally, the hour came, and school was dismissed. He waited for his sister and the two walked home together.

When they arrived, Jack uncharacteristically ignored his homework and everything else and closed himself in his bedroom. Pulling the cork from the bottle, he found everything on deck exactly as he had left it. Not a

minute had gone by and soon he was again at the helm. The skies were clear, and a good wind continued to push them towards the south. That night Jack slept as his first mate took the helm; and knowing it was the weekend, he did not immediately return to his bedroom when he awoke on the pirate ship.

He sailed most of the day then late in the evening of the second day, he returned to his bedroom. It had been much longer than a night in the bottle and yet the sun was just rising. Not wanting to appear out of place, he went into the kitchen to get some breakfast. After a minute his little sister came in and asked him where he was last night. "You went in your room right after school and at dinner Mom sent me in to check on you, but you weren't in your room." Jack insisted he hadn't gone anywhere. He quickly finished his breakfast and retreated to his room. Again, pulling the cork from the bottle he returned to his pirate ship.

Spanish ships full of treasure couldn't be that far away? Jack thought. He and his crew spent the next three days sailing south and a little east. It was going to take time to find them. Having been three days, Jack figured he should return to his bedroom in case more time had passed than previously. Corking the bottle, he found himself again in his room. He entered the kitchen and quickly ascertained that again, only one night had passed. He eagerly ate breakfast. To his family, he seemed as if he had just gotten out of a trance. Emiline wanted to play outside with Jack, but he didn't want to. All he could think about was his ship.

But after a few minutes of her repeated requests, he relented. "Let's play pirates," Emiline declared. Jack sighed and joined in the game, but his heart just wasn't in it. He could actually be on the deck of his own pirate ship, and now playing pirates with his sister just wasn't the same as it had been. They finished their game, but Emiline was disappointed. It just hadn't been as fun when Jack wasn't excited about it. Jack returned inside and went to his room. There he returned to his ship. For days he sailed the seas eating, sleeping, issuing commands, and taking the helm in search of Spanish treasure ships full of cargo, but none appeared.

Jack gradually became frustrated; he hadn't thought being a pirate would be this much work or that finding treasure ships to plunder would take so long. In his frustration, he pulled the bottle from his coat pocket and returned to his bedroom. His bedroom seemed strange, like it was a place he had been away from for a long time. Again, the sun was just rising, but Jack didn't recall the day. A call from his mother quickly reminded him "Jack you're going to be late to school!" It was Monday.

Jack was soon walking with his sister. She could tell he was frustrated about something. But when she asked, he wouldn't say what. At the start of class Jack's teacher inquired about his homework. He didn't have it and instead offered some excuse about being busy over the weekend. All that day he alternated between daydreaming about finding the Spanish treasure ship and being frustrated about how long it was taking to find. From the opposite side of the classroom Annette watched him as he was lost in thought. In truth she liked him, and she had seen how kind he had been to his sister in the past, it impressed her. Perhaps if he wasn't so lost in thought Jack might have noticed. When school was over, he walked home with his sister, that day the two barely talked. Jack thought about how his pursuit of the ship had made him forget his homework. I can't stay with my ship so long that I forget to do my homework or what I'm supposed to do in the real world, he thought to himself.

Then he resolved to complete his homework first and return to the deck of his ship, but this time for only two days in the world of the bottle. That evening after dinner he returned to his ship. His crew was vigilant, and Jack and his first mate steered and commanded the ship well. But still, they did not find any Spanish treasure ships. At the end of the second day, Jack retired to his captain's quarters. In the morning he awoke recalling his commitment to only spend two days with his ship at a time. At that moment he heard the call, "Sail, Ho!" Knowing it was a ship, he immediately pulled out his bottle.

If he waited a moment longer, who knew how long he might stay. Putting in the cork again, he found himself in his bedroom more excited than he could remember ever being. As usual the sun was just coming up. It was Tuesday. He rushed to school with his homework in hand turned it in and

did his best to pretend to be attentive in class. The moment school was over, he headed home as fast as he could, not realizing that he had left without his sister.

When he arrived home, he went straight to his room and closed the door. Being out of breath, he paused for only a moment before grasping the bottle and again pulling the cork. On deck again, he pulled out his spy glass and looked in the direction the watchman indicated. Surely enough, it was a Spanish ship loaded down heavy with treasure. With all its weight, the ship was slow and would be easy prey for Jack and his crew. Shortly they caught up to it and Jack ordered his men to run up the Jolly Roger and fire a shot across its bow. The cannon was fired and a moment later the vessel raised a white flag. Cheers erupted from Jack's crew, and they soon boarded the vessel.

The crew of the treasure ship was tightly locked in the hold and the treasure was split between the two vessels. The first mate and a skeleton crew took control of the second vessel and Jack declared that they were to head to port to offload their wealth. Fair skies greeted them, and the crew sang a cheery chantey. Smiles could be seen on the face of every pirate. Not only did they have treasure, but their enemy had surrendered without a fight and without any injury of Jack's crew!

It was a perfect day indeed! To celebrate their great haul, Jack named their ship The Hind's Revenge to pay homage to his favorite pirates Sir Francis Drake and Blackbeard. They sailed east for two days whereupon they arrived at port to hide and spend their treasure. The prisoners were marooned on a small island far enough away from the bay that they couldn't be a problem. Most of the treasure was divided up, but a bit was taken quietly by Jack and his first mate to a small island by raft. There they buried it for a time when they might need to obtain a new ship and crew.

That evening all celebrated in the inn, Jack addressed his crew commemorating their victory. As the hours grew late Jack thought to himself that perhaps he never wanted to go back to his bedroom. It felt good to be important, to be the center of attention, and to live the victorious life of a pirate. Knowing he would not miss the next sunrise in the real world,

he decided he would spend as much time as he wanted in the world of the bottle. Nothing it seemed could be better.

The ships and crew stayed at port for a week or two until their money had all been spent or hidden away. Jack and his first mate, sensing that it was time to prepare to leave, called for all hands-on deck to refit the treasure ship with cannons. After the refitting, they soon departed bringing on new crew mates to fill both vessels. Now with a small fleet of two they could be bolder and more aggressive. Over the coming weeks they plundered then skuttled two more vessels. Not treasure ships mind you, but merchant ships with cargo. Some of the cargo they took, but the rest they let sink to the bottom of the sea.

Jack's vessel hadn't taken any damage in either encounter, but their second vessel was in need of repairs. The two captains opted to perform the major repairs on the vessel when they reached port where they would offload and sell their stolen goods. On the morning of the fifth day of their return to port Jack was awoken early by his new first mate. Three ships had been sighted. Alarmed, Jack ran to the main deck calling for the yellow sick flag to be raised to indicate sick crew members aboard in a hope that the ships would not get too close. Using his spyglass, it was as he feared: three ships of the Royal Navy outfitted with fifty guns each.

“They’re likely patrolling for us,” he remarked to his first mate. With one of their two ships slowed by its need for repairs and knowing they were outnumbered and outgunned, they chose to wait. Perhaps they would be passed by? The captains prepared for the worst and indeed it soon came. Turning towards them, the three ships of the Royal Navy made a perfect course for Jack. The two captains seeing there would be no escape, prepared their men who loaded the cannons. Every man received a sword and for a moment there was silence until the warning shot came. It was then that Jack signaled to the other captain that they were to attack the right most vessel. Quickly the two moved to engage, cannons fired from all vessels splitting wood and spreading splinters as they impacted their intended targets. Their swift action for the moment had worked and Jack's pirates had the advantage. One of the Royal Navy vessels began to sink.

Jack's men began to reload the cannons, but before they could prepare, they received a complete volley from one of the two ships. Everything on deck turned into chaos as injured men laid above and below. Only a moment passed by and they were boarded. The clang and clash of swords could be heard all around. Jack soon faced a soldier of the Royal Navy and though Jack had a sword he did not know how to use it well. Jack did his best to defend himself but surely, he would have been bested if it had not been for an explosion. Deep inside the ship, a barrel of gunpowder intended for one of the cannons took fire and a moment later, the force of its explosion carved an opening that covered a third of the upper deck. Jack was thrown then everything went dark.

Sometime later, Jack awoke finding that he was in a holding cell apart from the remnants of his crew who still lived. It was soon confirmed that they were locked aboard the larger of the two warships they had fought. Both Jack's pirate ships were sunk, and the few remaining crew were to be put on trial. Jack felt a pain on his left side and noticed he had been cut by the fragments of his bottle. "No! No! No! How will I get home?" he worried. Though it was useless he put the cork into the shattered neck of the bottle hoping it would still return him home to his room, but nothing happened.

That night Jack laid on the makeshift bed in his cell worrying. What would he do? If he died in the world of the bottle, would he die in the real world, too? He missed his sister Emiline. He thought about all the things he had missed and all the things he would yet miss from having spent so much time in the bottle. What about his grades? What about Annette? A pirate can't feel regret for these things, he thought. But he was no real pirate, only a pretender trapped in the world he had learned to escape to.

Weeks went by and Jack threw away the glass. Soon he found himself locked in a cell at the port from which he'd first departed. His men planned to break out, but their chance never came. One night a guard came to Jack and told him that in the morning he was to see a magistrate and that he would be found guilty and executed. The guard brought Jack his last meal. It was underdone potatoes and something old and unrecognizable

accompanied with a bottle of what must have been rum or cider. Jack wasn't hungry, he didn't want to move, and he didn't want anything except to go home. After a while he began to fumble nervously in his pockets. His right-hand laid hold of something. He looked at it, it was the cork. It was then he had an idea. He didn't think it would work, but he tried it anyway. Pouring out the bottle that came with his dinner, he put the old cork in the new bottle.

Jack found himself standing in his room holding the newly corked bottle. To his eyes, his room looked strange, like it was a place he knew but that had lost some of its significance from him having been gone from it for so long. Out his window the sun was rising, it was Wednesday. "School! I have school!" He exclaimed.



That morning Jack's Sister Emiline thought it was strange that her brother hugged her so tightly. Not that she minded, because she loved Jack. Only this hug was just like the one you give someone when you haven't seen them for a long time and miss them very much. As for Jack he worked hard in school and only a short while later his sister Emiline saw him talking

with Annette. Both were smiling the biggest grins you can imagine, and they soon began to spend time together nearly every day. Emiline and her brother Jack were never closer; and as for the bottle and the cork, Jack kept them for a time. One day after spending time with Emiline and Annette, he buried them in a chest of simple trinkets out in a field among the grass. There it laid awaiting the finder of its secrets. But that is a story for another time.

The End



The Dress of Pearls



There once was a daughter of a wealthy baron. Her name was Tiona. Her father was so wealthy that the king would borrow money from him and allow him to frequent the royal palace as if it was his home. The only thing he loved as much as his wealth and position was his daughter. He liked to spoil her with every comfort, every treasure, and every opportunity he could afford. All she needed to do was ask and her father would grant her every desire. No gift was too much for his little Tiona.

As Tiona grew, she developed a love for beautiful things especially dresses and pearls. For her thirteenth birthday she asked her father for a dress. “Father,” she requested “I want a beautiful dress made of pearls. It must shine so that not even the queen will have a dress as fine and perfect as mine.” Soon her father had received baskets of the most perfect imported pearls. Most were rare, perfectly round, and white, but there were still rarer blue and pink pearls that her father had purchased that were also to be part of the dress. The dress was even sewn by the King's own tailor in private.

At last, when the dress was complete, her father had it folded into a case made of rosewood from the East lined with silk. When he presented it, Tiona's eyes gleamed and she squealed with excitement. Immediately she went to her room to put it on. She returned dressed in all the splendor of a lake of pearls. The dress was nearly all white like the clouded heavens with a little pink and blue around the wrists and skirt. Tiona turned around and around showing her father. Her father was pleased that she found such delight in it. That night long after he had retired to bed, she continued to

look at it in the mirror. Then when the hour grew later and later, she slept in her magnificent dress.

In the coming weeks, Tiona became more and more fixated on her new dress. She would wear it to dinner, sometimes wear it outside, and like that first night she often slept in it. Her father worried that with her constant flaunting of it inside and outside their home that something might happen. Maybe she would be robbed or worse? Though he was very wealthy, he could not bear the thought of losing her like he had lost her mother. Tiona however did not listen to him and her infatuation with the dress grew day by day. Sometimes he would hear her say, "I'm more beautiful than the queen!" This worried him, but he did not know what to do.

True to his fears, her dress had caught the eyes of someone, or rather something. Within proximity of their home laid the edge of a great swamp. It was vast and, in some places, quite deep. Within that swamp lived a great beast, a mud dragon the size of a carriage. Occasionally he would wander to the edges of the giant swamp. Spying out from its mud, he had seen Tiona in the backyard of the large house wearing the shining dress of pearls. He did not know what pearls were, but in his ignorance all he knew was that the shining creature he saw was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen. Because of its beauty, he began to covet it greatly. He knew that whatever it was it must sleep in the great house at the edge of the swamp. So, one night he emerged from the murky waters with a rope and tools to go in search of it.

Perhaps if Tiona had not had her bed moved onto the main floor of the house and had instead left it in her room with its small door frame, the mud dragon might not have found her. Yet as the mud dragon came in, there she slept. He was awestruck with her beauty: the pearl dress shined even more radiant up close than it had from afar. Not wanting to wake her, he carefully moved to slide and lift the bed upon his back. He then secured it with the rope and quietly began to make his way to the center of the great swamp.

A little before morning, he arrived and carefully unloaded the mattress with the sleeping Tiona on a small hill of dirt elevated above the muck of

the swamp. He then lowered himself into the waters and went to hunt fish knowing that the lovely creature he had brought would soon wake up and would likely be hungry. Soon fragments of the warm glow of the sun cut through the morning fog of the swamp and Tiona awakened. Though she was on her familiar bed, it was unexplainably in a swamp. Confusion set in as she looked around, not knowing where she was and how she had gotten there, only that it was surrounded by Cyprus trees standing tall amidst the green and brown water. The immediate area where her bed sat was partly covered over with green moss that had clearly been disturbed by a large creature with powerful claws. Tiona was afraid. What sort of creature had taken her from her home and placed her so far into the swamp?



Tiona did not have to wait long. After a few minutes, the mud dragon returned. Rising out of the mud with a fish in its mouth, it slowly approached her. Seeing the beast rise out of the water she screamed. Hopping off the bed, she jumped away from the beast and began to wade through the murky water. She heard a splash behind her, turning to look she tripped on an underwater root. A moment later, she was scooped up by the

mud dragon and carried back to the bed. The mud dragon presented her with the fish and insisted, "Eat, I brought you here to be with me."

Tiona, seeing that the creature was not going to eat her, accepted the fish but did not want to eat it. She had never eaten raw fish and she didn't think it would taste good. The mud dragon seemed very pleased with himself and explained how he had seen her shine from the edge of the swamp. and then how he had brought her to live with him. Tiona was sad but figured she could not reason with the beast. She instead thought to deceive it and to wade through the swamp until she found the end of it. She looked down at her dress covered in brown and green from the much of the water. "Not my beautiful dress! I love this more than anything in the world!" she lamented.

So she began to clean it as best she could. The beast offered her a stick that she used to lift some of the clumps of algae. As she worked, the mud dragon began to tell her about his lovely swamp. He talked about how thick the green algae had grown over the years. He talked about the Cyprus trees and their deep roots that drank from the waters. He told her about the fish he would hunt and the crawdads that would hide from him anywhere they could. He talked for such a long time that Tiona thought he would never finish. He chatted all that day and into the night only stopping when he saw that Tiona had fallen asleep. It was then that he himself figured he should retire to his delightfully murky bed, for although he was a creature of the night, he had missed his sleep that day talking.

Tiona awoke early and not seeing the mud dragon anywhere, she decided to attempt to escape. Quietly she tiptoed to the water's edge and began to slowly wade away from the tiny island. The water quickly grew deeper and so she started to swim. The mud dragon who was a far faster swimmer had already awoken and was not far away. To him the sounds of her splashes and the shine of the dress of pearls were beacons alerting him of her escape. In a moment he scooped her up and carried her back placing her upon the bed of the tiny island. "Why did you try to get away? The mud dragon inquired. "Is it because I did not yet bring you a fish? Here let me catch you one," he insisted.

Instantly he plunged under the water. A few seconds later, he returned, holding a fish in his mouth. He offered it to Tiona who accepted it. Lifting it to her mouth, she took a bite to please her captor. It tasted terrible, but she forced a smile. The mud dragon was pleased and set off to hunt her and himself more delicious things. shortly he returned, bringing his catches of fish and crawdads, and again, he talked until night while she did her best to clean the pearl dress.

Over the coming days, Tiona continued her escape attempts to no avail. Each time she attempted the mud dragon could hear her in the water and see her shining dress. Once she even got out of sight of the tiny island, only to be caught up again by the mud dragon and returned. Each time she was brought back, she would sit on the bed and again do her best to clean the dress. "I miss my father and my home," she wept to herself. "A girl in such a beautiful dress should never be found in a swamp."

After another two weeks, she ceased her escape attempts. She thought there was no hope for her to ever get far enough away to return home. But, even if she could get far enough away, she didn't know which direction she should go. The swamp seemed to go on forever. There she was stuck.

It was during this time that a mother heron had built a nest in the tree next to the tiny island and began to raise her young. For a time, she sat on the eggs nesting them until they were ready to hatch. Tiona, desperately wanting a friend on the tiny island, began to talk to her and tell her about her lovely and expensive dress. The heron thought her dress was the most beautiful thing it had ever seen, and Tiona was glad to talk to someone other than the mud dragon. For the mud dragon would rarely let her speak. It was not long, and the heron began to see that Tiona's obsession with the dress was part of what kept her from escaping to freedom and home. Tiona occasionally would ask for extra fish from the mud dragon and would give them to the heron who was very grateful indeed.

One day when the mud dragon was napping in his shell underwater, Tiona told the heron about how she had been taken from her father's home. The heron thought this terrible indeed and asked the young girl to describe

her father's house. Tiona explained it was a large home bigger than any except the castle and that it was colored white. The mother heron remarked she knew the place well and that it laid four miles to the south behind the tiny island. Tiona was grateful but assumed that her escape was impossible. The mud dragon could hear her splashes in the water too easily and he always managed to spot her with his sharp eyes. The heron remarked that the dress was easy to detect, so leaving it would surely help her escape. Tiona paid the remark no heed; however, for she couldn't dream of giving up her beautiful dress for anything, not even her freedom.

After about a month, the heron's eggs hatched and she busied herself with feeding her young constantly. Tiona was sad because now the heron was much too busy to talk. She soon grew quite lonely and began to wish to return home more than ever before. One morning while the heron was out gathering food, one of her young fell from the nest and landed in the swamp. Tiona heard its cries for help and quickly scooped it out of the water. Just then the mother heron returned and found one of her babies missing. Tiona called up to her saying, "One of your babies fell into the swamp and I saved it. Here, she's ready to go back to the nest."

The mother heron was grateful almost beyond expression and with a quick flap of her wings carried her baby back up to the nest. She of course insisted that she do something to help Tiona return home that very day. She told Tiona that if she was ever to return home, then she must give up her pearl dress. Tiona resisted for nearly a half an hour, until finally the heron convinced her to leave it behind.

It was then the heron dove into the water. A second later, she returned with a large crawdad in her beak. She laid it on the bed next to Tiona and spoke to it saying, "I'll give you a second chance at life and not eat you if you'll do one thing." The crawdad, expecting to have already been eaten, held his claws high pointing them at the heron. "What are you asking?" He inquired. "As you might be aware, Tiona is being held here by the mud dragon and she needs to escape to return home to her father. When the mud dragon is asleep, we need you to ever so carefully fill his ears with mud, so that he cannot hear her splashes when she escapes," she explained.

The crawdad did not like the idea of walking up to the head of a sleeping monster let alone putting something in its ears. The heron, seeing its hesitation, added, “If you cooperate, I promise to never eat you and to tell all other herons to do the same. If you won't cooperate, I'll eat you in an instant.” The crawdad thought this a very reasonable proposition and committed to do just as requested.

The heron set off immediately to fetch something they needed, while the crawdad anxiously waited for the mud dragon to take a breath of air and fall back into his slumber. When the breath came, he cautiously waited a few minutes and then carefully descended into the water making his way to the mud dragon. A few minutes went by, and the heron returned with a potato sack. She handed it to Tiona saying, “Now you must leave behind your pearl dress. This sack will give you extra cover as you travel through the swamp. I can help guide you from the air once you are far beyond the eyes and ears of the mud dragon.”



Then Tiona nodded and the heron tore holes in the sack: one for Tiona's head and two for her arms. Tiona took off the pearl dress replacing it with

the worn potato sack that the heron had torn holes in. It was then that the crawdad emerged from the cool swampy water and declared that its work was done. The ears of the mud dragon were plugged. Tiona thanked the crawdad for his bravery upon which he responded, "No need to thank me miss, though it was a bargain for my life. It was a pleasure to know I was also helping you." In turn, Tiona turned to the heron who assured her, "I'll call out to you to look up and follow me once you're out of sight of the mud dragon."

Next, Tiona carefully began to wade out into the swamp. A short paddle and then soon she was wading in the water again. Turning around now, she could see that the tiny hill was out of sight. She felt a burst of excitement but restrained herself to be certain the mud dragon would not be able to see or hear her. A few minutes later, she heard the call of the heron and looked up to see her friend guiding her way. She followed and after an hour or two she started taking breaks. It was tiring watching and sometimes swimming through the muck of the swamp. But with persistence as daylight waned, the heron told her she was close. The sky by now had become overcast and a light rain began to fall.

Finally, Tiona saw her home in the distance. The sight of it renewed her courage and drive. Within a short while she found herself climbing the banks of earth behind her home. The rain was heavier now, but as she came to the back of the house she turned and looked up to the sky and shouting through her tears she exclaimed, "Thank you heron! I'm home!"

Knocking as hard as she could, she called out for her father. Again, she pounded on the door saying, "Father I'm home. It's Tiona!" As she began to pound the third time the door opened. Her father looked at her and immediately began to sob opening his arms. Then Tiona was engulfed in the warm embrace of her father's joy.

From that evening on, neither Tiona nor her father saw much value in beautiful dresses, wealth, or positions. They rediscovered value in the simple treasure of each other, and the gift of help that others had given them. Soon they began to seek to help others in the same way that the heron had helped Tiona. The heron and the crawdad lived in relative harmony, and

each grew to a grand old age. Sometimes the heron would stop by Tiona and her father's home to say hi. And by so doing, they kept in contact.

Now you might be wondering what happened to the mud dragon. In truth, he never suspected a thing. That night when the time came for him to wake, he cleared out his ears chalking it up to thick silt and paying it little thought. When he went to the tiny island, all he found was the pearl dress. He figured that Tiona must have dissolved or perhaps she had grown too small from not eating enough fish. The only remedy he could think of was to feed the shining thing until it was restored and began to speak again. And so, he lounged in the swamp day after day, stuffing fish in the dress and telling it all about the lovely swamp, the thick green algae, and the Cyprus trees.

The End



The Cooper's Magic Barrel



Across the blue waves of the sea, across vast sandy deserts, and beyond deep forests filled with fairies there once laid a great kingdom called Luth. Luth was a peaceful kingdom with a wise and kindly king who cared deeply for his subjects. His life was one of service and sacrifice and all who knew him loved him. All that is except for his half-brother Markell who desired his throne. His brother had been banished years before for repeatedly stealing from the royal treasury. And yet he returned. On the night before the new year under the new moon he attacked the castle with a great army of outcasts, thieves, and hired soldiers. The castle guard assembled and fought with their might, but still the defenses of the castle fell and soon the king's brother Markell marched into the throne room.

Above him at the top of the castle's highest tower the Queen's faithful attendant Prudence held the King's only son Bren who was not but a year old. She affixed the sleeping child to the royal messenger gryphon then wrote a letter saying "The castle is lost, the King's brother has returned, and a foul magic is upon the place. Speed away the son of our fallen King and let him be hidden. That by our prayers he may grow up to relieve us from the oppression that surely doth fall upon us now!" And with that, the attendant affixed the letter and the royal seal of the queen to the griffin with the King's son and it flew off into the night. A short while later, the precious cargo of the messenger griffin was delivered safely to the gryphon keeper and his wife. Upon reading the letter, they wisely fled. They sped the king's son off on foot to be hidden where they could raise him until he came of age to rightfully claim his throne.



Their flight had not been unjustified for the following night the griffin keeping house and its loft were burned and the griffin flew away. Though he had never seen him the king's brother, knew of the child and desired that he would meet the same fate as his mother and father. Yet it was in vain for the child had been taken and hid beyond the borders of the kingdom. There the baby grew to be a boy and his goodly stepparents told him, that he was a great secret. A prince and heir of the throne of Luth, they taught him to read, to write, and to be wise and kindly. Yet, these were not enough. "You must also have courage. For the day will come when you must face your uncle, claim your throne, and serve Luth as it's King" they insisted.

The boy Bren grew to be a young man of sound judgement, and strong by cutting wood. Sometimes he wondered what it would be like when he faced his uncle. How would he triumph? Surely his uncle who killed his mother and father would not just hand the kingdom to him. So, the young prince

found a blacksmith who taught him how to duel with the sword and by cutting wood he paid for the forging of a fine blade to wear at his side. Yet while the prince was flourishing in his learning and growth, the kingdom of Luth had fallen nearly into ruin. True to the words of the letter written by the king's servant on that fateful night, every peasant and citizen were under the tight fist of the false king. They were taxed, whipped, and forced to labor for his wealth and pleasure.

Some spoke out, but each time a garrison of soldiers no better than thieves would come from the castle the following day and silence their voices. The people grew quieter as their farms, and herds were slowly eaten by the king and his soldiers. Yet in that quiet, rumors spread as whispers that the son of the king was yet alive and that he would come to claim his throne and restore the equity, kindness, and wisdom of his father in the kingdom again. Yet this was not the only rumor. Whispers of a great beast that sometimes roamed the castle circulated among the false king's soldiers and made its way through the citizenry. Some believed and others did not. Yet regardless of what the citizens deemed, they began to starve as the soldiers of the false king devoured the crops and flocks of the people.

One day word of the starving people of Luth came to the ears of the old Griffin keeper and his wife. They knew then that the time had come for the prince to return to claim his throne. That night at supper they told prince Bren that word had come that the people of his kingdom were starving. If he was to save them and claim his throne, the time was now. In spite of the great task that was before him Prince Bren agreed. The old couple directed him to seek three citizens who would be able to help. The first was a blacksmith named Ferrum, the second was the town crier, and the third was the wife of a man who made barrels called a cooper. Her name was Prudence and she had been an attendant to the queen. Each could help the prince in preparing and organizing the people to lay siege to the castle and defeat the soldiers and the false king himself.

At dawn Bren departed for Luth on foot. Not wanting to draw attention to himself, he wore the clothes of a woodcutter. That night he slept in the woods under a canopy of green leaves that shaded him from the silver light

of the waxing moon. He traveled all the next day and part of that night then slept under the cover of a bush. Nearing Luth the following morning, he hid his sword in a log then made the last steps of his journey into Luth itself.

As Prince Bren entered Luth, he was greeted by a terrible sight. Every building was in disrepair and most citizens were dressed in rags many without covering for their feet. A dead horse laid behind a building and Bren could hear a small child crying for food. Bren's heart went out to them, and he resolved, "I'll find the three citizens and restore these people and all of Luth to the beautiful state it was when my father once kept it." Bren spoke to the first man he saw "You there, where may I find the Blacksmith Ferrum?" The man looked at Bren and took him for a man from a distant region. "Ferrum has been dead three years and we have no blacksmith. The only smith works in the castle, but if you need a smith, you won't want to go there to find one. Better to leave," he warned.

"Where might I find the town crier?" Bren requested. The man pointed to a fresh grave across the street "he is dead too" he answered. Bren gulped a little, but not to be dissuaded from his quest he asked again, "Where might I find the Cooper and his wife Prudence?" The man whispered his reply, "He too is probably dead, since he disappeared nearly twenty years ago on the night the false King stormed the castle. His wife still lives in the cottage down the second lane yonder," he pointed. Bren thanked the man and followed his directions to the house of the Cooper.

Arriving at the door, he knocked and immediately heard a rustle inside. He knocked again and a moment later the door opened a crack. The woman inside inquired, "Who is it and what do you want?" Bren answered, "I've been sent by the gryphon keeper and his wife to find Prudence. I'm told she can help me." The woman gasped and a moment later she opened the door, "Come in," she invited.

So Prince Bren entered the house. "Take a seat," the woman insisted. "I haven't seen or heard from the gryphon keeper or his wife since the fall of the castle nearly twenty years ago. The same night that my Henry disappeared," she reflected. "I'm sorry," the prince empathized.

“Who are you and why have you come?” She questioned. Taking a seat Bren declared, “I’m Bren, the son of the late king. I’ve come seeking to reclaim my father's throne! I’ve been told that you, Ferrum the blacksmith, and the town crier can help me. Yet, I was just told that the two of them are dead.”

“You’re correct they are dead, and I’m indeed Prudence,” the woman confirmed. “Who told you that they were dead?” Prudence inquired. “A man in the town, I did not ask his name.” Bren replied. “As long as it wasn't an armored soldier,” Prudence remarked. “It wasn't,” the prince certified. “The violence, and greed of the False King and his soldiers can be seen everywhere. There are many who will join you. But, what proof do you have that you’re indeed the son of our once great King?” She questioned.

In turn, Bren presented his mother's ring with its seal. Upon seeing it she instantly knew it. Prudence responded, “It is indeed the queen's ring missing all these years. It was I who by the command of your mother sent it with you. I’ll do my best to serve you as I once served your family in the castle. Though it has been years, I still know its layout well. Yet, there’s something that you must know. Among the soldiers there are rumors of a terrible beast that dwells among the halls and throne of the castle. I’ve never seen it, but there are those who from a distance have. At night its occasional cry can be heard, and the terrible sound can nearly curdle the blood of even the bravest heart!” She cautioned.

Bren felt a chill crawl up his spine, but as Prudence continued, he resolved to not let his fear of a terrible beast deter him from seeking his throne. “Though I know the castle and its secret rooms and passages, there are many soldiers. So even with great skill with your sword, you’ll be no match for their numbers. The town's people will join you, but without a blacksmith to make swords our efforts will be doomed to fail.

The prince thought for a moment then commanded, “Show me the castle! Where’s the armory?” Pulling a piece of charcoal from the fire, Prudence used the surface of the table as a canvas and began to draw a map of everything she could recall of the castle's layout. The gate, hallways, the

armory, the throne room, and nearly everything else. The prince pointed at the armory asking, "Is there a window here?" "Yes" Prudence answered.

Prudence followed as the prince explained, "If we can get into the castle through that window, we can dispose of the soldier's weapons." "Wise!" Prudence remarked, "we won't have time to train the townsfolk with the weapons, however. The castle blacksmith will only forge more." "We'll take their weapons and surprise them. The townsfolk know how to use poles, pitchforks, and pruninghooks." The prince suggested. Prudence paused for a moment then looked across the room of her little house at a barrel.

"Let me show you something," she directed. Handing Prince Bren a stone from the floor and pointing at the barrel, she urged, "Follow my instructions carefully, tap on the barrel twice with your hand whisper a word to the barrel then drop the stone in. The prince thought this strange, but he followed Prudence's instructions. He tapped, whispered a word to the barrel, then in he dropped the stone. No sound followed. The prince looked in the barrel there was nothing inside. "Mysterious?!" He remarked. Then Prudence added, "now tap the barrel as before and whisper the same word to the barrel again."



Bren did so and immediately the rock popped out of the barrel and landed on the floor. “Now do it with the staff” Prudence suggested. The prince picked up a staff that leaned against the wall and noted how it was slightly taller than the barrel. He repeated the process again with the staff and like the rock it completely disappeared inside. Then as before when the prince tapped and whispered the word, the staff was returned. Prudence pointed at the ceiling in her house where it had clearly been patched and informed him, “The louder you say the word, the more forceful the barrel will return the item.”

The prince gazed at the ordinary looking barrel and asked where it came from? “My husband was once brought this barrel by a small mob of fluttering fairies who requested that it be fixed. They paid him in gold yet when his work was done, they never returned to claim it. It laid here for a long time. My husband always suspected there was something magical about it, but on the night of the castle siege nearly twenty years ago, he disappeared. I loved him and I looked for him. But after two years of searching and hearing no word, I gave up. By chance five years ago, I found the magic of the barrel. I have found myself hoping that it might contain a clue to his disappearance, but nothing has come of it. I apologize,”

Prudence said, “Even after all these years I often ruminate and hope for his return.”

Prince Bren, putting the two things together, exclaimed, “We can sneak the barrel into the castle armory and empty everything into it. If the villagers attack the castle few of the soldiers will have any swords or armor to protect it. While the villagers attack, I’ll make my way to the throne room and defeat the false king in a duel. The false king will be dead, and the people will be free.”

“But what of the great beast?” Prudence advised. The two worked together planning for the remainder of that day and well into the night. Though she was tired, an hour after dawn Prudence left and went from house to house and person to person in the town alerting all that the son of their long-departed king had returned and that he would present himself and a plan to retake the castle that night in the Old Inn. The town was talkative that day and it made Prudence glad when none of the soldiers came down from the castle to make trouble with the townsfolk. That night every villager assembled in the old inn.

Prudence addressed them, “Fellow citizens, for nearly twenty years we have been under the oppression of the false king. He has taxed us more than what is needful, he has taken some of our daughters and sons, his soldiers have beaten us without cause, taken much of our food, and those who have resisted have been killed. But no longer! Most of us remember our former king, his service, and his kindness. With us now stands his son Prince Bren! Who has been kept safe these many years by the now aged griffin keeper and his wife. As proof here’s his mother's ring. He has returned and promised to serve us and treat us with dignity as his father did before him. He’ll speak to you now!”

The prince began, “I’m Prince Bren, as Prudence has told you I promise to serve and treat you all with the same dignity as my father once did. Again, you’ll have prosperity without fear. Yet, I need your help. Though I’m skilled with the blade, the soldiers of the false king are too many for me alone. With the help of Prudence and a few maids, we’ll deliver much of the

remaining food we have in barrels to the castle to get inside. I will climb into the castle by a rope let down by Prudence and we'll dispose of the entire contents of the armory in this magic barrel. Then we'll signal from the window when all is ready. As I'll support you, please support me as king. With the soldiers disarmed, you'll attack with every implement available. While your attack commences, the soldiers will be distracted and I'll go to the throne room defeat the false king and whatever beast may be there and win back your freedom!" With that, all the villager's cheered in a roar of celebration pledging their support to Prince Bren in his siege. Prudence quickly silenced the crowd and urged everyone to prepare for the following night.

The next day the food was prepared, and the magic barrel was taken among the other barrels by Prudence and the maids to the castle. Price Bren retrieved his sword from the log and that evening he waited in a bush below the window of the armory. At last, the rope was secured and draped out the window. Prince Bren left the bush, and began his climb. Up, up, up three, then six floors he climbed until he came to the window. Prudence and one of the maidens helped him inside and the three set to work emptying the contents of the armory into the magic barrel. For every sword they tapped the barrel twice and whispered sword. For armor, they whispered, "armor," and for shields, they whispered, "shield."

After about a half an hour, the armory was bare, all except for the barrel and a red banner that hung over the door. It was then that Prudence lit a lamp and handed it to Bren. Bren held the lamp out the window signaling to the townspeople that the contents of the armory were secured and they could begin their attack on the castle. They watched for a moment as a little train of torches began to snake its way up from the town towards the castle. "The soldiers will be here for their swords soon. We'd better hide now," Prudence advised. "To the door, bring the barrel, come!" She quietly instructed.

Peering out the door and down the hallway she waited until the coast was clear and signaled for Bren and the maiden to follow her. Tiptoeing across the red ragged carpet, Prudence came to an ornately carved part of the wall

and depressed some kind of hidden switch. Immediately the recessed panel next to it opened. “Get inside,” Prudence motioned. The three entered carefully rolling the barrel in with them and Prudence closed the panel behind.

Huddling in the dark little room, they could feel that it had been undisturbed for quite some time. They waited for what seemed like an hour though it had likely only been a few minutes. Soon, the rapid noise of panicked footsteps passed by them heading to the armory. The villagers attack had begun. Bren could hear the panicked noises of the soldiers of the False King as they found the armory bear. Some ran and others began to fashion clubs out of whatever thing they could find. When the hallway went quiet Prudence whispered, “Now is the time for you to ascend the stairs and make your way to the throne room, Prince Bren. Go now, claim your family’s throne and free us! But if it lives, beware of the great beast.”

Prudence opened the panel and the prince stepped out brandishing his sword as he carefully made his way to the steps. His heart beat fast thinking that around any corner the great beast could appear. Yet, his courage did not fail him, so he marched on. Up the stairs he advanced cautiously entering the open hallway at the top. A terrible smell like the rot of a sewer filled the air. Quietly Prince Bren walked peering around a corner in the middle of the hall at a dead end. There sat a pile of waste from what must have been a giant creature. But the great beast was nowhere to be seen. Bren continued to the end of the hallway and peeked around the corner at what should have been the doors to the throne room. Instead, the doorway lay open with its giant doors broken and partly hanging at the sides.

The prince cautiously entered the room. No beast waited for him. Only a man wearing a crown sitting upon the throne. The prince, brandishing his sword, called out to him, “False king! I’ve come to claim my father’s throne. You’ll surrender to me!” The False King looked at him and rose from his seat and declaring, “No! You escaped me once. Your fate will be the same as your father’s.” And with that, he removed the crown from his head setting it on the throne and he too brandished a sword.

A duel commenced with each occasionally gaining some ground on the other only to lose it. Back and forth they fought striking, blocking and parrying the other. For a time, the False King held his own against Bren. But the False King was old and slowly Prince Bren began to gain the upper hand. Finally, he disarmed the False King. “Now will you surrender?” Bren offered. The False King said nothing and quickly fled. Using the throne as a barrier he covered behind it shielding himself from the young Prince. Before the Prince could say anything, a strange mist suddenly arose in the room, and the body of the False King warped and grew into a hulking beast five times its original size. The beast was much larger than Prince Bren had expected. Prince Bren being brave, but also wise, knew that this was the time to run. Out the gaping doorway and down the hallway, he ran as quickly as he could. The great beast was not as swift, yet it followed behind Bren with a terrible rage that could splinter bone. Bren rushed down the staircase with all the speed he could muster only to find Prudence and the maiden at the bottom. Barely able to get a word out he alerted them, “The Beast is coming!” Not wasting a second Prudence urged, “Help us with the barrel!”



The prince looked at her as if she was mad, but she insisted, “Call for the swords!” The prince understood and rushed to help them angle the barrel at the mouth of the stairs. Just as it was angled the Great Beast appeared. Prince Bren tapped three times on the side of the barrel and though nearly out of breath yelled “Sword!” Out of the barrel flew hundreds of swords. Pommels ricocheted, blades pierced, and the great beast fell dead.

That night the attack of the Townsfolk was successful, with the False King defeated the Great Beast lay dead and a new day of prosperity and freedom had begun. The Townsfolk cleaned and began to restore the castle, and a month after the retaking of it a coronation ceremony was held where Prince Bren was to be crowned King of Luth. Behind a curtain the prince waited as the master of ceremony spoke about his father, the years of oppression, and the courage of the prince. Though Bren was indeed a courageous young man he had never felt more afraid in his life than at that moment. The sound of Prudence's voice from behind him calmed him a little. “Prudence,” the prince asked. “How will I ever be able to do this? The task of serving a kingdom is so great.”

“You’re more prepared than you know. You’re wise, determined, and concerned. Take that same courage that carried you up the steps to the throne room and you won’t fail. The people are with you, and you won’t be alone. Governing with wisdom, courage, and care will be hard. But you are up to the task!” she assured.

Prince Bren smiled “Thank you Prudence, I couldn’t have done this without you.” Then pausing added, “I have need of your reassurance, will you be my attendant as a member of my court?” Prudence was honored, but she did not hesitate, “Yes” she answered. A moment later his name was announced to all who had gathered. The prince whispered to himself “Courage, all will be well.” Then with Prudence he stepped out to greet his cheering subjects.

So it was that the young King Bren began to learn a new kind of courage as he governed with wisdom and care. Across the kingdom of Luth prosperity and peace were restored. Every citizen rejoiced in their love and

adoration of their king, and none were found wanting. You might wonder what happened to the enchanted barrel. After saving the contents of the Armory Prudence returned it to her home where it stayed. Not long after her husband returned and the two had the most joyful reunion. Where had he gone all this time, you might ask? He was in the barrel.

The End



The Speckled Robin Eggs



In a distant land there once was a playful little boy with blonde hair and a grin that lifted the spirits of everyone around him. Each day he loved to play outside in the yard near the edge of the woods. From tiny ants to squirrels and rabbits he was kind to all. He was also very curious and loved to examine things like shiny stones, bugs, and flowers. But most of all he loved to watch birds. He adored the cardinal's flashy red jacket, he was pleased with the blue jay's wintery blue feathers, and he awed over the occasional golden oriole that landed in the yard.

One day while playing near the edge of the woods he spotted a rare white robin building a nest in a nearby tree. The nest was not as high as most others but still being four times the height of the little boy it was much too high for him get a good look. A fence stood nearby and so he climbed upon it and balanced on his feet to get the best look he could. The robin appeared to be a little uneasy at first, but after a few minutes it decided that the little boy was too small to be any threat to its nest and so it continued about its work. After a while the boy grew tired of watching it and went about again playing in the yard. Over the next few days, he returned every day to see the robin's progress on her nest.

One day after about a week when the boy came to look at the nest, he saw the white robin sitting in it. Every now and then the white robin would leave and shortly return. The boy was curious and so he stood atop the fence when she was gone to get a better look. In the nest he could see the tops of the prettiest speckled robin eggs. Wow! The boy thought to himself. What lovely little eggs! The boy had never seen eggs so perfect. He desired to hold them. He did not want to keep them; he only wanted to hold them

for indeed he felt they were precious. Though the eggs were too high for him to touch he imagined to himself that he could indeed reach out and touch them.

After a few minutes standing and looking the boy was overcome, he had to have them if only for a few moments. Without thinking things completely through, he found a stone about the size of his little hand and began to hurl it upward towards the nest to knock the eggs out so that he might catch them. How he was going to get the eggs back into the nest, he did not know. But he knew that he must have them. Over and over, he flung the heavy rock upward towards the nest, but its weight made his already terrible aim worse.



At last, he hurled the rock upward with an arc that was nearly true. Slightly above the height of the nest it went and dropped landing in the center of it with a crunch. The boy stood still for a moment and pondered what had happened. He did not mean for this to occur. The white robin returned and eyed her nest for her eggs that only a moment before had laid

in it. Only the stone remained, the eggs were crushed. She looked at the little boy. The boy felt terrible. He had never felt this bad before. How could I have hurt this poor robin with my selfish desire to handle its beautiful blue eggs? How could I undo this terrible thing that I have done?

A moment later, he found himself running towards his cottage home and inside to his room where he hid. He felt sick, he cried, and nothing that day would make him feel better. The following morning, he awoke to the sound of a crow outside his window. It seemed to caw “guilty! guilty! guilty!” Over and over, “guilty! guilty! guilty!” The boy remembered what he had done the day before and sat there feeling terrible. As if to strengthen his guilt, he went again to see the white robin's nest. Standing by the fence looking up at it, he regretted, “Why did I ever want to hold those beautiful robin's eggs?” He thought for a moment how hurt the mother robin must have been finding her beautiful eggs crushed by a rock. He wished that he could undo what he had done. He went home and said nothing to his mother or father about it.

The next day he awoke and began to go about his day. But every little while the thought of the little white robin came into his mind. Over the coming days he often sat on the fence and would sulk. The young boy had a very fine watch, and he would look at it and wish it was magic and that he could turn back its hands and thus roll back time to undo his deed. But it was in vain, the watch was not magic, and time could not be rolled back.

One day when he went to the fence to sulk two mourning doves saw him. They were wise and knew many things. Unlike most other creatures they could speak. When they saw the boy sitting there, they thought he looked a very pitiful sight indeed. They watched intently and when they saw a tear fall from his face and touch the ground they cooed softly and asked, “Why are you crying?”

The boy, not used to being addressed by birds of any sort, paused then admitted, “I wanted to examine a robin's eggs. I tried to get them, but I crushed them. I feel terrible.” The doves all at once knew what to say, “You cannot undo what you’ve done. But you feel sorrowful for it. This hurts, but

it's good because you recognize you have hurt another. Now you must seek the white robin and apologize."

"Where will I find the white robin? The boy inquired. She has abandoned her nest." The doves answered, "She has gone to a distant island. If you wish it, at dawn our friend the great crane will come and take you there. It's a large island, but if you search hard, you'll find the white robin and be able to apologize." The boy was glad to be able to do something and went to bed knowing that in the morning he would meet the great crane.

Just as the doves had spoken at dawn, the great crane arrived at the boy's home. The boy woken from his sleep by a thunderous noise outside quickly put on his clothes and shoes thinking to himself, it must be the great crane! Indeed, it was... Opening the door to his house, he looked up in awe at a giant bird with white feathers whose wings spanned the length of a house. It cocked its head to one side and as the boy looked up into its soft blue eyes it laid down one of its great wings so that he might climb aboard. The boy did not hesitate and climbed atop it, setting himself down between two of the largest rows of feathers where holding on would be easiest.

Then a moment later, they were off into the clear summer sky. As the wind blew through the boy's hair he looked up. The sky seemed to go on forever and like stray sheep, a few clouds wandered its otherwise perfectly blue pasture. The boy was glad that the great crane's wings were so wide, it kept him from seeing the ground below. The crane flew so smoothly that if it hadn't been for the takeoff and the clouds that surrounded them, the boy would think that they would have never left the ground. They flew all that day and then at sunset they landed and rested for the night. The boy slept nestled on the back of the bird. It seemed to him as if he had a fine bed of warm and soft feathers all to himself, and he slept quite comfortably.

In the morning they took off, heading for the island flying all day. Day after day they flew and night after night the boy rested, thinking about his apology to the white robin. Finally, one afternoon they arrived at the island. Having landed the boy could see the green leaves and vines that covered

much of its surface. The great crane lowered itself turning his left wing and looked at the boy as if to say, "You're here, seek the white robin."

As a result, the boy nearly slid down the great crane's wing but stopped himself feeling that it wouldn't be respectful to the great bird who had just brought him such a long way. Instead, he carefully stepped down and hopped to the dirt covered earth below. Looking at the island, it was much larger than he expected. The island's size could have been discouraging, but he remembered what the doves had said and immediately began his search for the white robin. Up and down, he looked calling out, "White robin, where are you? White robin where are you?" over and over. He searched through the thick green foliage until it began to be late, and his voice began to go hoarse.

At last he decided to lay down for the night with the hope of finding the white robin in the morning. He slept very uncomfortably that night on a root that seemed to move wherever he rested. Eventually the sun rose and with it the boy continued his search. Finding there was no end to the vines and leaves he fixed himself a stick which he used to whack and push them out of his way. He occasionally called out, "White robin, where are you?" but there was no response.

There were birds in many of the trees, but none of them were the white robin. "Hello," he called out to some, "have you seen the white robin?" Each time the birds paid him no mind. They were far too distracted, and their chirps were much too loud to hear the boy. Finally, the sun began to set and with the onset of twilight the boy again laid down to sleep. He slept much better that night on a bed of leaves.

When morning came, he rose with the sun and continued his search determined to find the white robin and apologize for what he had done. At last, the boy looked up in a tree and there sat the white robin. Unlike the other birds who cheerfully chirped, it sat on a leafless branch with its head hung low, not making a sound. The boy was silent for a moment then addressed the robin apologizing "White Robin, I'm sorry I hurt you. I'm

sorry I crushed your eggs; I was selfish and foolish, and I only wish I had a way to repay you for what I've done.”



The robin stayed silent and for a moment the boy just stood there. Suddenly the Robin leaned forward and fell from the top branch. The boy who was quick on his feet swiftly stepped forward and caught the little bird in both of his hands. He stood up and looked closely at it. The little bird seemed thin, sick, and barely able to move. The boy then and there resolved to care for the little robin until it recovered. Wrapping its body carefully in his shirt, he searched for worms, berries, and bugs to feed the little bird. As he happened upon some currant bushes, he realized that he too was hungry. He ate carefully and then fed the little bird some more.

For the next few days, he cared for the white robin feeding it and giving it fresh drinks of dew. At last, it began to recover and started to stand on its own feet. The robin at first had been confused that the boy who hurt it so badly was caring for it. But over time it grew used to the kindness of the boy. A day later, the boy lifted the robin up and it flew landing on a nearby branch. The boy smiled and the robin chirped with joy. It was then the great crane arrived and let down it's wing as if signaling that it was time for the

boy to return home. The boy held his finger out and the robin glided landing on his outstretched finger. "It's time for me to go. I'm glad to have helped you." Maybe when the seasons change, I'll see you again. The two parted, holding a fondness for one another that is normally only reserved for one's family or best friend.

To the boy the trip home seemed longer than his trip to the island. When he finally arrived at his home, the ground was covered in brown leaves and a hint of winter frost was in the air. Strangely the two doves were there waiting for the boy in the tree. They cooed and then spoke, "You have done kindly; the robin is sure to return in the spring. What will you do then?"

The boy was silent and a moment later the two doves flew off as if they didn't need a reply. The boy thought about their question. He thought about it when the snow came, he thought about it at Christmas, and he thought about it as the green grass began to poke its head out of the melting snow. Spring came and with it the little white robin returned. The boy saw him chirping from a branch. The boy selected the best tree for the robin's nest and certified "Here's the safest tree for your nest. I too will protect it."

When the nest was built, true to his word the boy always kept his watchful eye upon it. Twice he chased away squirrels that ventured too close to the nest and once he even deflected a snake that hungered for the perfect speckled eggs it contained. So complete was the change of heart of the little boy that every creature around knew of his commitment to protect the nest and eggs.

After a few short weeks, the eggs hatched and out came the loveliest chirping white robin chicks. The boy saw them and thought that they too were beautiful, but he did not seek to touch them. They were pretty enough in the nest. May each of us do likewise when we find that we have hurt someone, by seeking to apologize and do our best to restore what was lost.

The End



Acknowledgements



To My Children,

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ALSO BY NATHANAEL WRIGHT

Poetic Curiosities of Rhapsody and Rhyme

Poetic Curiosities of Light, Love and Adventure

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Love Touches Time

Fairy Tales of Kindness & Courage: Volume I

Coming Soon: The Glass Girl: A Fairy Tale Novella

Coming Soon: Seeking Charity